

How to Launch Women into Political Leadership

Erin Vilardi and Jehmu Greene of VoteRunLead (VRL) are moving thousands of women toward political leadership and public life. VRL, a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization, has trained more than 16,000 women over the last 10 years and is now leveraging technology to reach millions more. The VRL team brings a combined 90+ years of experience in political mobilization.

They invited questions on [the group's Facebook page](#) from the YALI Network earlier in February, and we're following up now with their responses.

Erin and Jehmu: We are excited to answer questions from the YALI network.

First, we wanted to share a few thoughts about the principles of our work.



The work of building a healthy democracy is rewarding, life-changing and, often, difficult and long. The work of changing a culture to value women as full, talented, capable citizens with responsibilities is really, really hard work. But it's awesome, inspiring and motivating.

It is the work of transformation, and it is the best thing we can do for our daughters and our sons.

The United States does not lead the way when it comes to women's political representation. Many countries — such as Rwanda, China and Italy — have more women in leadership (often employing tools, such as quotas, that won't fit culturally here in the United States). So, while we share our experiences with you, you are the best people to transform your countries and to empower women all across Africa.

Be inspired by some of the greatest human rights champions.

"Be the change you wish to see in the world." Mahatma Gandhi

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

One of our personal favorites remains "One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors." Plato

In solidarity,

Erin and Jehmu

Coretta Nkhoma: How can one be involved in politics without really being in the forefront?

Erin and Jehmu: There are many roles that you can play to lead a political life without being the "candidate" or the person in front of the cameras. Behind every good candidate or outward-facing leader is a team of individuals. We would encourage you to go and talk with a current female (or male) elected official who represents your area, and ask about the support systems and political infrastructure in place. Specifically, learn the jobs that are behind the scenes that may interest you or fit with your skills. While we encourage you to do this, we also want to note that women too often

prefer to be the #2 rather than the #1. We are socialized to serve others. Ask yourself if your discomfort with being in the front is more because you think you belong as #2, rather than where your talents should be, as the #1!

Mel Chipso Njanji Makuwaza: What is the process for women to venture into politics, especially in Zimbabwe? Please, need a step by step. Does it require a certain age, education or background?

Erin and Jehmu: In Zimbabwe, we would suggest reaching out to Netsai Mushonga, national coordinator of the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe, or Grace Ruvimbo Chirenje, coordinator of the Zimbabwe Young Women's Network for Peacebuilding. We recommend the article linked below with more names of female parliamentarians who may be able to help or support you. When you reach out, ask them for something specific and concrete. For example: "Can you connect me to local resources in my area? Who is a woman I should reach out to help me move forward? Are there elections happening soon that I should be getting involved with?"

See more at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/9/zimbabwe-women-mps-sworn-in>

Do not be discouraged if you do not hear back right away. It is critical that you keep contacting them. Many people are busy and receive a lot requests.

We also suggest you connect to WorldPulse.com and start communicating with other women in Zimbabwe who are a part of this supportive global network of sisterhood. In fact, we believe World Pulse is a great resource for women in any country.

Very often there are few or no requirements for holding office. The most popular requirement is age. Research your country and ask around. We need all perspectives in government; don't think because you are not a lawyer that you cannot be in public office. Many more backgrounds including mothers, farmers, business owners, educators, artists, etc., are desperately needed in public life.

The basics of running for office or standing for election often mean filing appropriate paperwork to declare your intentions, working with a party to help support your platform, putting a small team together to manage your campaign, and, most importantly, reaching those who vote. This means using events, signs, media, etc., gaining exposure for your name and your message.

Finally, always asking for citizens' votes on Election Day. That description simplifies an often complex process, but the basics are the same.

Vince Ras Otti: What can be done to encourage women from the marginalized areas to embrace politics? What is the best way of helping them get jobs in the public service?

Erin and Jehmu: Research from the West shows that asking women to consider public office, connecting them to the appropriate people and helping to build their confidence are the best ways to encourage women to run. Talk with women that you think would make great leaders or are ready to run and take the time to answer their questions. There is not enough research on women's political ambitions specifically related to African women, but I believe encouragement from party officials and other leaders would also hold great weight. The next step is to create favorable conditions that allow her to lead a political life, including talking with her partner or husband about how the family will navigate her political career, what roadblocks to expect from sexist people and how to handle

them. Most importantly, get her connected to other women in public life who can share real world experiences and help her to understand the impact they are making by being in politics.

Don't forget about the many remarkable African leaders such as recent Nobel Peace Prize winners Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, activists Leymah Gbowee and [Tawakkol Karman](#) or leader Wangari Muta Maathai. When and where you can, research the "firsts" all across Africa and share their stories. Find a quick [Wiki report on "firsts" here](#).

Kellvin Aongola: In the case of Africa, I believe the barriers that limit women begin with us men and our male centered culture. For women to fully participate in politics and government, men should change their cultural perceptions of women as inferior beings meant for the kitchen, babies and other domestic activities. Men should encourage women to aspire for greater things.

Erin and Jehmu: Everyone has a role to play in creating an environment, a culture, and a society that values women and men equally.

Ebune Ayenuwa: How do married women combine home keeping with active politics?

Erin and Jehmu: It takes a village, including the husband, to increase the number of women active in politics. The married couple needs to communicate with one another about how the household responsibilities will be shared, how the child rearing will be shared. The children and the larger community will be better off with her and other women leading the country! They can discuss what will get done, what will not get done, and other options, such as allowing family members to live with them to help support their needs.

Mwesigye Siryabo: How can women be encouraged to get involved in local leadership? That's the starting point of women participation in leadership and public service.

Erin Vilardi in Sierra Leone



Erin and Jehmu: First, one must understand who currently controls local politics and ask what strategies they have in place for recruiting more women. If they do not have any, help them create those strategies! Next, educate women in the local community who might consider getting involved with local elections or engaging current office holders. Likely candidates might be found among those who are selling goods or have a trade, are advocating or supporting women, working for NGOs, trusted in the community or well-spoken.

We have to show women the real ability to make a difference comes from being involved in local politics. By building understanding of the role of local government, creating more welcoming local parties, and supporting women's ambitions, we will see more interest in these positions.

Amole Joel Oyebo: How can we drive the message to create a belief system in women that politics is not only for the male folks?

Erin and Jehmu: Wonderful question. At VoteRunLead, we have a three-part model to create a belief system within themselves that they are capable, strong and needed for public life. Our model is "inspire, equip and inform." First, we must inspire women to lead by showing them other women who look like them and who can serve as role models for their aspirations. We must inspire them to

believe that politics and government help the people and have impact in the lives of their communities. Next, we must equip them with the tools of public leadership — speaking strongly and communicating their vision, storytelling to motivate others, learning to debate, raising campaign funds, and compromising to get to a solution.

Nsude Chinedu Solomon: In a typical African society, a woman's major role is the home front. Anything that takes her further from home is usually frowned at. This, I think, is a major challenge. It really will take an "exceptional" husband to support his wife to be involved, actively, in politics. Therefore, how do we get husbands/men to trust and support their wives/women political ambitions?

Erin and Jehmu: We are not interested in changing husbands, instead we are interested in the harder work of transforming cultures which allow behaviors devaluing women in society.

Here's what we've seen work in the United States and in our travels to over a dozen international cities, including a few in African countries.

Products: About a decade ago Erin's former boss created President Barbie, making the extremely popular doll one that had political aspirations. Now, in the U.S., there is a growing sector of girls' toys that allow for them to dream big — from engineers to doctors to tech titans! Let's teach girls to imagine themselves as leaders through play; the impact is significant.

Art and Media: Across the world, film and documentary, popular radio, and TV have served to spark conversation and tell untold stories. Support women's films, buy music by female artists, encourage networks and radio programs to have women's voices and perspectives. Make women's lives and leadership a part of the mainstream conversation.

Count the numbers and have a watchdog organization (or many!): Having a basic understanding of the abysmal numbers of women in leadership has helped move the dial not only in U.S. politics, but it is also influencing U.S. and global business. From there, creating watchdog organizations (or even lone individuals) who hold business, government and other institutions accountable for increasing the low numbers of women in their organizations.

Use the Internet to show amazing women and to shame the shameful: We have still not seen the full power of the Internet to transform democracies. Some of us may be skeptical of its power, given the "Arab Spring" uprisings and subsequent results, but nonetheless, the Internet is your personal power tool to help spread the word of women's leadership, share resources, connect with others around the world and create networks of support. Don't let this vehicle for change go to waste.

Daughters: In the U.S., we've seen that speaking to men about the next generation of women leaders — about their own daughters and the kind of world they want for them — begins to change hearts and minds. This is a powerful tool for getting stubborn thinkers to see the world of gender equality in a new way.

Girls' Education: This must continue. Must. At all costs.

As an individual, make sure you are talking with your own family about politics, girls' and women's rights, the importance of voting, and participation in democracy. You can bring the newspaper to meals with your family and ask your children their opinion about the issues of the day. You can send

your daughter to school and make sure the older women in your life are literate and can help support girls' education. You can call out other men who perpetuate stereotypes, which hold women and the countries back. You can use social media to tell stories of remarkable women and share resources and connect with others. You can share the Internet with those who may not be able to afford it.

Finally, ask women to run for leadership positions. Encourage like-minded men [who support women as leaders] to do the same. Demonstrate how companies, organizations and local governments with women leaders are doing better, making the "business case" for increasing women's leadership.

Ezema Chukwudi: How can you encourage women's participation in politics in a country like Nigeria, where one must have a huge capital base before you venture into politics?

VoteRunLead Board of Directors



Erin and Jehmu: In the near term, go to the daughters and wives of the wealthy and encourage them to get involved. Many of the early women leaders in American politics were the wives and daughters of previous male officials (including such notable names as Nancy Pelosi and others in Congress). Here is a recent article on the topic: <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/01/dynastic-candidates-of-2016.html>

These women often have the mobility and access to circles of influence that many others do not. And, while you are working to change the system of big capital in politics, you need more female role models to help inspire other women to lead. Role models are a big part of making it seem possible for any marginalized group to run for elected office, especially women who have long been missing from those roles. Then, start programs inside and outside political parties that encourage both men and women candidates — parties that allow for people of lower economic means to have opportunities for leadership or government service.

Some of us are simply going to have to lead even with little financial means. Yes, it will be hard. Yes, it will seem impossible at times. But, one or two breakthrough women candidates can create a whole new structure of possibility.

Building a thriving democracy that includes women is not just a gender issue; you are right in understanding that the influence that class has on the political system is critical to building it right. Keep going!

Erin Vilardi and Jehmu Greene are from [VoteRunLead](#), a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization that trains women for leadership positions.

#YALICHAT: Engaging Youth in the Democratic Process

Voting is one of the greatest civic responsibilities of a citizen. However, many youth across Africa are unaware of the steps one needs to take to participate in the electoral process in their countries. Join two Mandela Washington Fellows, Sobel Ngom from Senegal and Chedi Ngulu from Tanzania, to learn about their initiatives to educate youth about their voting rights and the registration process. They will discuss how they initiated their projects, mobilized volunteers and other organizations to help them, and how they used traditional and social media to spread the word.

For more about the program, read "[To Get Change, Vote](#)"

About the Program

Sobel Aziz Alfred Marie Ngom, Senegal

[Sobel Ngom](#) is the Founder and Executive Director of Social Change Factory, a citizen leadership center created in whose mission is to inform youth of their civil, economic and social responsibilities. In 2012, he designed and implemented the Voix Des jeunes (Voices of Youth), a program that provide key information regarding the voting registration and process during the 2012 elections in Senegal.

Chedi Festo Ngulu, Tanzania

[Chedi Ngulu](#) is the founder of MegaMark Communications and has led several major commercial and social marketing campaigns for companies, government, and international organizations. He plans to implement #AHADI, a voter education and registration campaign to increase youth engagement in the upcoming 2015 general elections in Tanzania.

Senegalese Group Teaches How to Vote, Have a Choice

Join Sobel on the video #YALICHAT [Engaging Youth in the Democratic Process](#) on Wednesday, February 25th at 1400 UTC.

As Dakar resident Sobel Ngom completed his high school final exams, he began to think that if more people knew how to vote, they could change their country's future.

A visit to a family friend in a village shed further insight on that thought. The visit "changed my life," Ngom says. The villagers he met "didn't care about elections. They didn't know the candidates. The democratic system was not a part of their lives."

Later, as a communications major at SupDeCo University in Dakar, Ngom set his sights on teaching people all over Senegal how to vote. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2012, just as

Senegal's presidential election was approaching. He wanted people to make conscious, informed decisions about who their next political leader would be.

He recruited a couple of university friends to join him. With about \$3,000 in contributions from friends and family, the three-member team developed a voter education campaign that combined social media, print, television and in-person outreach strategies designed to reach as many people as possible. Through word-of-mouth, within weeks the team had grown to 25 volunteers.

Achieving Success

Ngom, a member of the YALI Network and 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow, described how his group in three months created greater awareness among the targeted audience about the voting process.

The team organized public presentations to help villagers understand the importance of voting. The presentations included a basic handout using simple language to describe the basics of democracy and voter registration.

The team worked one-on-one with older community members – most of whom had no official record of their birth or residency – to help them get proper documentation from their municipal governments allowing their registration as voters. Older people were “very supportive” of what the team was doing, Ngom says.

To reach youth, the team employed social media platforms like Facebook and You Tube, and events like concerts to encourage voter registration and democratic participation. It put an online version of the handout on its Facebook page called [Voix Des Jeunes](#) (Voices of Youth).


Ngom's colleagues even created an online practice ballot to familiarize future voters with the process of casting a vote. Because their parents had never voted, youth, who are the majority of Internet users, did not have a family tradition of going to the polls.

“We chose not to say to people ‘guys, you have to vote,’” Ngom emphasizes. Instead, “we wanted to help them understand the process.” Team members stayed away from promoting or opposing any candidate.

Along the way, Ngom says he sought advice from an uncle and other family members. His father, a diplomat, and sister, a former United Nations development worker, helped him find out how to apply for additional funding.

Parallel to this voter education work, Ngom heads the social media department for a digital company. He also has started several projects including a summer school program for rural youth, aiming to reduce the gap in national exam results between rural and urban students. He recently started a leadership center called “Social Change Factory” to inform youth in French-speaking Africa of their civic, economic and social responsibilities.

10 Characteristics of a Servant Leader

In Johannesburg, a young boy walks in front of a tribute  mural to Nelson Mandela. Mandela embodied all of the characteristics of a servant leader.

From greedy executives to despotic rulers, we've all seen examples of poor leadership. But we've also seen the examples of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. — servant leaders who were able to accomplish great things by putting people first.

To help YALI Network members on their paths toward servant leadership, we've curated a list of characteristics that define servant leaders based on Robert K. Greenleaf's seminal essay. It's not exhaustive, but it's a start!


1. **Listens actively:** A servant leader's first response to any problem is to listen. She seeks to identify the will of the group and helps clarify that will by listening. When she listens, she does so intently. She does not multitask or interrupt, but truly strives to understand the speaker.
2. **Prioritizes:** Can you separate the important from the unimportant? What about the important from the urgent? A servant leader can withdraw from the present situation and prioritize his responsibilities. And he handles his most pressing duties with the knowledge that there may be consequences for neglecting the less pressing ones.
3. **Accepts others:** A servant leader accept others as they are, where they are. She assumes that people have good intentions, and she values the unique skills, attributes and contributions of each individual. She does not, however, accept disruptive behaviors or poor performance. She recognizes the difference between accepting a person and accepting his actions.
4. **Guesses correctly:** Every day, leaders have to make decisions without enough information, the right information or sufficient time. Servant leaders bridge this information gap through intuition. They look for patterns, they revisit history and they make educated guesses about the best course of action. Most importantly, servant leaders understand that these educated guesses are just that — guesses — and they are willing to change course if necessary.
5. **Foresees the future:** Servant leaders have a better than average ability to predict the likely outcome of a situation. Closely related to intuition, foresight refers to a leader's ability to understand the past and present to predict the future. Without this ability, a leader would lose his characteristic "lead."
6. **Possesses awareness:** To maintain strong intuition and foresight, a servant leader must know what's going on. He must have an awareness of world history, current events, industry standards and his own organization. He must have a sense of self and of those he leads. In short, a servant leader must be awake.
7. **Adapts readily:** Servant leaders have a keen understanding of the past, but don't model their leadership style after a historical figure. Instead, they adapt to the time, place and problem. They invent a unique role that both meets the needs of their followers and relies heavily upon

their own strengths.

8. **Sets a vision:** A servant leader is not afraid of failure. On the contrary, she initiates a course of action, provides the structure and accepts the risks. As Greenleaf wrote, “A leader says: ‘I will go; follow me!’ while knowing that the path is uncertain, even dangerous.”
9. **Persuades others:** Another distinctive characteristic of the servant leader is his reliance on persuasion. Instead of using his position to coerce others, a servant leader is able to convince his followers by demonstrating the compelling benefits of his vision.
10. **Empowers others:** A commitment to empowering others is the hallmark of a servant leader. She is able to promote and encourage personal and professional growth in the people she leads. They are healthier, wiser and more likely to become servant leaders themselves. When a leader sees these qualities emerge in her followers, she has become a successful servant leader.

Source: [The Servant as Leader by Robert K. Greenleaf](#)

Guinean Advocate Stands Up for Rights


Oscar Ouendeno, lower right, spreads  awareness of human rights with neighbors in Labé, Guinea.

Democracy advocate Oscar Ouendeno stresses that “all Africans must know what everyone is legally able to do so that they can limit others’ abuses.”

Since 2009, the 28-year-old YALI Network member from Labé, Guinea, has been telling his neighbors about the “respect for human rights and democratic principles” spelled out in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

In 2007, members of the African Union meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, adopted the charter that envisions “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena.” The charter, which the United States supports, sets out international standards of good governance and democracy in such areas as rule of law, free and fair elections, and condemnation of unconstitutional changes of government. The Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, based in Stockholm, lists the countries that have [ratified](#) the charter as of June 2014.

A believer in the power of groups, Ouendeno says he and his volunteers have reached more than 2,000 people in his home city with this pro-rights message. Additional colleagues have reached even more people in other cities in Guinea. Members of the group pay for most of their own outreach expenses with help from friends and family contributions. Ouendeno, a graduate of Guinea’s University Center of Labé (Centre Universitaire de Labé), says the limited funding has been a major barrier to their efforts.

Ouendeno teaches university  students about the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

The determined human rights advocate started a small nonprofit group to raise young people's awareness of democracy and the importance of an involved civil society. He also introduces young people to concepts and principles of entrepreneurship.

"I'm motivated by knowing that there are thousands of other young Africans whose dream it is to change Africa," he says. "YALI helps connect them so that their efforts are linked for success."

"YALI members have to always be reminded that only united [can we] stand," he said adding, "that change comes always after a struggle."

Ouendeno is a member of the Global Partnership on Youth in the Post-2015 Development Agenda (#GPY2015), an online crowdsourcing forum convened by the United Nations Secretary General's Envoy on Youth to help develop input for negotiations on the U.N.'s post-2015 agenda.


The year 2015 was the target year set in 2000 for achieving a host of development goals ranging from cutting poverty and hunger to increasing girls' education and boosting maternal health in the world's less-privileged countries. #GPY2015 aims to consolidate the outcomes of national, regional, global and online discussions into proposals for the post-2015 development framework.

"Youth must stand and face their responsibility to manage their destiny and the destiny of Africa," Ouendeno says.

Partner With the Media: 3 of 3

Effective partnerships with print and electronic media are essential to ensuring that a debate reaches a wide audience. But negotiating with the media can be challenging.

The National Democratic Institute, a nonprofit, nongovernmental Washington-based think tank, offers the following about partnering with the media. This is the last in a series of three articles about debates and has been edited for length and clarity.

A campaign worker is on the set in the  media center ahead of a 2012 debate between Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney and President Obama at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida.

Media Rivalry

Competition among media outlets may reduce their willingness to collaborate with debate planners. Planners may find it helpful to negotiate media coverage of debates through media associations that represent all outlets.

Candidate-Media Tensions

To help prevent tensions between candidates and the media, highlight the criteria used to select moderators and panelists, and explain how the selection process was designed to respect both the journalists and the debate.

Scheduling Conflicts

Consult with the media before scheduling a debate to avoid conflict with other scheduled major events that could distract both media and audience from your event.

Airtime Costs

The media may ask planners to pay for broadcast airtime for the debate. Convince broadcast media outlets that their contribution of the airtime is good public relations.


Sponsor-Media Agreements

Prepare agreements with media partners to ensure a common understanding of key aspects of the broadcast, such as:

- Shared objectives — Make mutual commitments to a dignified, impartial forum that treats candidates equally in terms of preparation rooms, lighting, audio, make-up, camera positions and other production details.
- Debate arrangements — Agree on dates, location and format of the debates.
- Commitments — Negotiate details of what the debate planner and the media will contribute. Confirm who will cover the cost of producing the debate broadcast, including building the set, hiring the technical crew and other expenses.
- Debate promotions — Encourage media to run announcements that promote upcoming debates.
- Television and radio feed — Confirm arrangements to distribute the debate via regional, national and/or international networks.
- Campaign ads — Prohibit the airing of paid political ads during commercial breaks in the debate.
- Ownership of broadcast rights — Establish who owns the rights to the debate broadcast, and ensure that it will be made available to more than one media outlet. This can include the use of debate footage for campaign ads and access to footage by civic groups that seek to promote accountability of elected officials.
- A “clean” broadcast — Limit the number of on-screen graphics that may be added, such as news crawls, candidate assessments, or real-time audience reactions to candidate statements. Any of these can be distracting or perceived as biased.

Also read [Candidate Debates Are Centerpiece of Democracy: 1 of 3](#) and [Organize a Candidate Debate](#).

Better Environmental Policies Can Help All of Africa's Problems

African Green 
Movement President
Michael David Terungwa,
left, shows children how to
plant a tree.

Democracy and good governance are the topics in focus on yali.state.gov in February. While those words bring to mind big capitol buildings filled with elected officials, good governance can also arise outside of capitol buildings, driven by ordinary citizens who just want to achieve something important for their communities and their country.

YALI Network member Michael David Terungwa, in Abuja, Nigeria, is one of those people. He's the current president of the [African Green Movement](#)(AGM), which he founded with a number of other African environmentalists working in Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Senegal, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Q: Why did you start the African Green Movement?

Terungwa: Environment is the foundation of human existence and all other life forms. According to Christianity and Islam, God created man from the soil, a major component of the environment. Soil, water, mineral, plant and animal life and other environmental resources all help humans meet their needs.

The human quest to master the environment has been beating the Earth to death. Climate change, desertification, soil erosion and pollution — human actions have caused all these problems.

Human greed is exceeding the carrying capacity of the Earth. We are stealing the future, selling it in the present and calling it gross domestic product. At this rate of environmental destruction, future generations will inherit a desolate Earth unable to sustain human life. Applying sustainable development to economic growth can meet both present and future needs.

Careful stewardship of the land and better use of resources is a major global concern. Africa, our dear continent, cannot be left out.

Q: How did members of the African Green Movement come together?


Terungwa: We are all African youths who attended a [Climate Reality Leadership](#) training in Johannesburg, South Africa, in March 2014. That experience inspired us to activism, and we came together to form the African Green Movement.

About 100 active members of the AGM in seven countries share a vision to inspire young Africans to protect the environment, embrace agriculture and sustainable living.

Q: So your founding members are all convinced that climate change is affecting Africa currently?

Terungwa: Absolutely. Scientific reports show that Africa will be among the regions worst affected by the consequences of climate change. Climate change is already here with us in Africa, it's true. The change in rainfall patterns, drought, flooding, failure of crops and low yields are all signs of the effect of climate change in Africa. The shrinking of Lake Chad — between Chad, Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon — is another clear sign; 95 percent of it dried up between 1963 and 2001.

Q: Do young Africans generally recognize the magnitude of environmental problems that challenge the Earth today, like climate change, species extinction and pollution?

These young Africans participated in  leadership training with the Climate Reality Project and formed the African Green Movement.

Terungwa: No, the majority of African young people, particularly those in rural areas, are not aware of environmental problems and their magnitude. The young people in towns and cities do have a higher awareness because the problems are already evident.

Q: What main channels of information is your group using to improve understanding of environmental topics?

Terungwa: Presently, we carry out social media campaigns, with about 1,600 followers on Facebook.

We organize talk shows and write to newspapers to raise community awareness about the issues.

We also want to partner with religious bodies that might reach a larger audience, particularly rural people who do not use social media or read newspapers. We hope that by reaching out to them, encouraging them to reach out to others, we can achieve a multiplier effect.

Q: Generally speaking, are African governments proactive in protecting the environment?

Terungwa: Africa's environment is heavily degraded and bringing adverse consequences to citizens. That is testimony to the fact that African governments are not proactive in protecting the environment and that regulatory frameworks have not had the desired effects.

Basic matters of health, education, opportunity, poverty are all pressing issues in Africa and maintaining a sustainable environment is related to all these. A degraded environment gives rise to poor sanitation, water scarcity, disease and poor yields in agriculture. These consequences lead to greater hunger, poverty, unemployment and poor health. Working for a sustainable environment will address all these challenges.

Q: What are some other objectives of the African Green Movement?


Terungwa: I'll quote you the objectives in our mission statement:

- Promote agricultural sustainability as a business and job creator.
- Organize tree-planting campaigns and environmental clean-ups.
- Collaborate with, and seek assistance from, international organizations for our activities.
- Youth participation and involvement in international aid and development.
- Organize training for African environmental activists through workshops and capacity building for young people in Africa.

We are in the process of registering the African Green Movement as a full-fledged nongovernmental organization in Kigali, Rwanda. Presently, we operate from Abuja, Nigeria, where the acting president resides.

We do not have government backing or financial aid as of now. We fund our activities from our individual earnings but with the passion we have, we do this joyfully.

Civil Society: At the Core of Democracy and Human Nature

Dozens of people rallied in New Mexico  in January 2015 in favor of using renewable fuels in electric power generation. Civil society groups have helped citizens play an influential role in local, regional and national energy policies.

When individual citizens with shared interests join together to voice their concerns, democracies work better. Civil society contributions to well-functioning governments are widely recognized among those who study these issues.

South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu once described the role of this social sector as "at the core of human nature. We human beings want to get together with others ... and act collectively to make our lives better."

Tutu's words were quoted in an extensive report on this topic in 2012, *Defending Civil Society*. The World Movement for Democracy published the report in its role as an organization dedicated to keeping democracies healthy and vibrant.

Though government attempts to suppress civil society activities somewhere in the world are reported frequently, *Defending Civil Society* establishes that citizen organizations have fundamental rights in international law.

The Right to Entry (Freedom of Association)

(1) International law protects the right of individuals to form, join and participate in civil society organizations, such as trade unions, associations and other types of civil society organizations (CSOs), to pursue a broad range of legal objectives.

(2) Individuals are not required to form a legal entity in order to enjoy the freedom of association.

(3) International law protects the right of individuals to form a CSO as a legal entity. Whatever system is put in place to extend a form of legal recognition must be accessible, with clear, speedy, apolitical and inexpensive procedures.

The Right to Operate Free from Unwarranted State Interference

(1) Once established, CSOs have the right to operate free from unwarranted state intrusion or interference in their affairs. International law creates a presumption against any regulation or restriction that interferes in recognized rights.

(a) Interference can only be justified where it is prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

(b) Laws and regulations governing CSOs should be implemented and enforced in a fair, apolitical, objective, transparent and consistent manner.

(2) Civil society representatives, individually and through their organizations, are protected against unwarranted interference with their privacy.

The Right to Free Expression

(1) Civil society representatives, individually and through their organizations, enjoy the right to freedom of expression. CSOs are protected in their ability to speak critically about government law or policy, and to speak favorably about human rights and fundamental freedoms.

(2) Interference with freedom of expression can only be justified where it is provided by law and necessary for respect of the rights or reputations of others, or for the protection of national security or public order, or of public health or morals.

The Right to Communication and Cooperation

(1) Civil society representatives have the right to communicate and seek cooperation with counterparts, the business community, international organizations and governments, both within and outside their home countries. Communications may occur through any media, across any border.

The Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

(1) Civil society representatives, individually and through their organizations, enjoy the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.


(2) The law should affirm a presumption in favor of holding assemblies. Those seeking to assemble should not be required to obtain permission to do so.

(a) Where advance notification is required, notification rules should not be onerous.

(b) The law should allow for spontaneous assembly, as an exception to the notification requirement, where the giving of notice is impracticable.

(3) The law should allow for simultaneous assemblies or counter-demonstrations, while recognizing the governmental responsibility to protect peaceful assemblies and participants in them.

(4) Interference with freedom of assembly can only be justified when it is in conformity with the law and necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

About 500 citizens participated in a  town hall meeting in Chicago on the legalization of medical marijuana, another controversial issue in which civil society organizations have wielded considerable influence.

The Right to Seek and Secure Resources

(1) Within broad parameters, CSOs have the right to seek and secure funding from legal sources, including individuals, businesses, civil society, international organizations and intergovernmental organizations, as well as local, national and foreign governments.

State Duty to Protect

(1) The state has a duty to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the obligation to protect the rights of civil society.

(2) The state duty should also ensure that the legislative framework relating to fundamental freedoms and civil society enables their activities and fully recognizes their rights.

View [Defending Civil Society](#) in full.

#YALICHAT on Technology & Democracy

On February 10th, the YALI Network featured Chris Spence, Chief Technology Officer at the [National](#)

[Democratic Institute \(NDI\)](#) in a 3-day Facebook #YALICHAT. NDI is a non-partisan organization that works to strengthen democratic institutions worldwide and encourages citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government. At NDI, Spence leads the initiatives to use technology to advance democratic governance. Questions and comments from the YALI Network centered on [the role of technology in democracy](#), [how technology can improve transparency and government accountability](#), and [using technology to empower people to become more involved in politics](#).

In advance of the #YALICHAT, Spence shared some of his experiences applying technology to democratic institutions in Africa in a blog post entitled [Using New Technologies to Strengthen Democracy](#).

Join the YALI Network to get updates on future #YALICHATs and engage with us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

The chat discussed...

Transparency:



Using social media to bridge gaps between youth and politicians:



Taking political action:



Online security:



Election monitoring:




Social media as a tool for marginalized groups:



Organize a Candidate Debate: 2 of 3

The National Democratic Institute, a nonprofit, nongovernmental Washington-based think tank, offers the following advice about organizing a debate between competing candidates. (This has been edited for length and clarity.)

Senator Mary Landrieu and Representative Bill Cassidy, both of Louisiana,  greet each other before the start of their final debate for the 2014 Senate runoff election.

The reputation of the group that plans a debate rests on the group's ability to establish and maintain the public's view of it as a fair and transparent organization. Perceptions of partisanship or of holding a poorly run debate can undermine the group's ability to convince candidates to take part in future debates.

Focus on the Goal

The purpose of a debate is to help voters make informed choices among candidates for elected office. Debate planners should try avoid being perceived as promoting particular media or business interests.

Keep It Simple

A debate requires managing many organizational, production, media and political issues. Keep plans basic — especially for a first-time debate — so less can go wrong. A simplified approach can help minimize last-minute complications that take time away from achieving the mission of informing voters. More advanced organizational and production methods can be added for subsequent debates.

No Such Thing as a Bad Debate

A less than perfect debate is better than no debate at all. Even a flawed debate informs voters to some extent. Just having a debate is a first step toward establishing the candidate debate as an expected and integral part of elections.

No Candidates, No Debate

Planners should be flexible when negotiating issues that could make candidates pull out of the proposed debate. While neutrality and fairness must not be sacrificed, it is worth making concessions to candidates to prevent debate negotiations from collapsing. Even if not all candidates decide to participate, holding the debate can focus campaigns on public policy issues and reduce political tensions.

As public expectations and media support for debates grows, so will the certainty that debates will

take place. Candidates become more compelled to participate.

Organizing a debate can be demanding. Among the many logistical details, these are some that must be considered:

- Select an appropriate debate format.
- Develop a timeline, budget and staffing plan for the debate.
- Select a production partner.
- Develop a media strategy to promote the debate.
- Present the debate plan to candidates and to other key players.
- Choose a debate venue.
- Ensure public safety. Coordinate with police and other security officials.
- Set guidelines for tickets and the debate audience.
- Decide who and how many people will be invited.
- Recruit and manage debate volunteers.
- Comply with local and electoral regulations by consulting with a legal adviser.
- Hold and broadcast the debate.
- Evaluate the debate to improve in the future.

More on debates is available in [Organizing and Producing Candidate Debates](#) on the National Democratic Institute website.
